

2012 Legislative Session

With the start of the 2012 legislative session around the corner (it begins on March 12th), legislators once again have a difficult challenge with ensuring critical services are provided in the face of continued budget shortfalls. Governor Jindal's budget includes a \$600 million increase for Medicaid, mostly due to inflation, but the executive budget is also contingent on many proposals for cost savings. If these proposals don't pass, there are concerns that rate cuts to Medicaid providers could reach up to eighteen percent. On top of the rate cuts over the past two years, cuts of this magnitude would devastate the service delivery system. Advocates will be prepared to defend against any additional budget cuts that would jeopardize community supports and services for people with developmental disabilities.

While Louisiana has made considerable progress in reducing the census in and number of the state's publicly run institutions, we have not made much movement away from private residential facilities – large and small. In fact, Louisiana has the most people per capita residing in ICFs/DD than any other state – with more than four times the national average! Fortunately Senator Fred Mills has filed SB227 that would support ICF/DD providers interested in converting to waiver services and allow funds paying for a person's care in a private facility to "follow" them into home and community based waiver services. For more information on the Money Follows the Person initiative please visit: <http://www.lacanadvocates.org/site/state-issues/>.

Of course advocacy efforts continue for additional New Opportunities Waiver (NOW) slots. With more than 8,500 people waiting more than seven years for a slot, advocates have been asking their legislators to consider funding for 200 additional NOW slots.

Another hot topic this session will involve efforts to reform the education system primarily by allowing children in failing schools to attend either charter schools or receive scholarships to attend private schools. Unfortunately, most charter schools and private schools do not serve students with more significant disabilities. Many private schools even ask parents of students with disabilities to waive their rights. Advocates will continue to seek assurances that these educational reforms ensure all students have equal access to and services in schools receiving public funding.

Individuals with disabilities and family members are encouraged to join the grassroots advocacy networks LaCAN and LaTEACH. Members receive updates on important issues being decided this session and are provided assistance with advocating for home and community-based services and an effective inclusive educational system. Sign up at www.laddc.org.



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